

AT THE MOVIES

'Date Movie'

A variety of unwelcome sights (comic Eddie Griffin coughing up a hair ball) pepper this lame attempt to satirize romantic comedies ranging from "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" to "Hitch."

Alyson Hannigan (Band Girl in the "American Pie" movies) looks for romantic love after a gargantuan weight loss and a stomach-churning makeover.

Rated: PG-13. Off-color material

'Eight Below'

More face time with canines and less with humans could have helped this story of sled dogs struggling to stay alive in Antarctica after their two-legged overseers leave them behind during a killer storm.

This entertaining tale of endurance and companionship offers some glorious vistas and good action, but the filmmakers mistakenly felt they needed a strong bipedal presence.

Rated: PG

'Firewall'

Here's a surprise. In "Firewall," Harrison Ford plays a heroic husband who winds up saving his family from kidnapers who are trying to coerce him into helping them carry out a high-tech robbery.

Ford's character is targeted by thieves because he heads up security at a small Seattle bank.

The picture leans heavily on Ford's well-established reliability, but becomes increasingly less credible as it moves toward a predictable hand-to-hand finale.

Rated: PG-13. Violence, situations in which children are under threat

'Freedom Land'

This downbeat and often disturbing adaptation of Richard Price's 1998 best seller deals with guilt, treachery and racial tensions in New Jersey.

Race becomes an issue when a distraught woman (Julianne Moore) tells a detective (Samuel L. Jackson) that her car was jacked by a black man and that her 4-year-old son was in the backseat.

The film's buoyed by strong performances from Jackson and Moore.

Rated: R. Profanity, violence

'The Pink Panther'

Steve Martin talks funny and carries a big shtick in this slapstick-heavy attempt to update the series made famous by Peter Sellers.

Martin's abilities as a physical comedian are put to good use as the bumbling Inspector Clouseau, but the movie, really a loose assemblage of sketches, is only intermittently funny.

Rated: PG

TAKE IT HOME ON DVD

'Rent'

Director Chris Columbus went from back-to-back blockbusters with the first two "Harry Potter" flicks to box-office dud with this adaptation of the stage musical smash.

"Rent" reunites most of the original Broadway cast with Rosario Dawson leading the newcomers in the story of friends, lovers, transsexuals and addicts coping with poverty, landlords and AIDS.

Along with deleted scenes, the two-disc set packs a documentary examining the life of Larson, who died as the show was going into previews in 1996.

'North Country'

Despite its sappy courtroom conclusion, "North Country" features terrific performances by Charlize Theron and Frances McDormand, who earned Oscar nods.

Theron stars as a single mom who bucks tradition and goes to work in the mines of Minnesota, where she ends up leading a sexual harassment case over the rotten treatment the company's handful of female miners receive.

The DVD has a background segment and deleted scenes.

'The Weather Man'

Nicolas Cage brings gray skies to this bizarrely dreary comic drama from Gore Verbinski, director of "Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl."

Cage stars as a weather man who makes a fortune for his easy gig on a Chicago TV station and has an audition for a network job yet is perpetually bummed-out.

The DVD has behind-the-scenes featurettes whose titles, such as "Atmospheric Pressure: The Style and Palette" and "Relative Humidity: The Characters," are as clever as anything in the movie.



In a spoof of "Mr. and Mrs. Smith," Grant (played by Adam Campbell), left, and Julia (Alyson Hannigan) undergo marriage counseling in "Date Movie."

Movie executives go for a cheap 'Date'

BY BETSY PICKLE
SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

"Date Movie" has been advertised as coming from "two of the six writers of 'Scary Movie.'" Apparently, the other two-thirds of that writing team were the ones with the talent.

Like "Scary Movie," "Date Movie" is a collection of scenes spoofing other films, with the briefest suggestion of a plot underneath.

"Date Movie" allegedly intends to make fun of romantic comedies, but its scattershot approach targets movies from a variety of genres.

Alyson Hannigan of the "American Pie" trilogy plays Julia Jones, who dreams of finding true love.

Trouble is, most people can't see Julia's beautiful nature behind her layers of fat.

Julia works in her family's restaurant, Greek Diner.

Her father, Frank (Eddie Griffin), is proud of his Greek heritage but makes no mention of the fact that he's black. Her mother, Linda (Meera Simhan), is Indian.

Her sister, Betty (Marie Matiko), is Japanese and has a blond Caucasian son. The family also is Jewish.

Frank wants Julia to marry within their culture. Julia is more of a romantic, especially after she shares a moment with a customer who quickly disappears.

Julia turns to date doctor Hitch

MOVIE REVIEW

'Date Movie'

• **Rating:** PG-13 for continuous crude and sexual humor, including language

• **Stars:** 1½ out of five

(Tony Cox) for help. After getting Julia renovated a la "Pimp My Ride," Hitch puts her on a dating show where the bachelor is Grant Fonckyardoder (Adam Campbell), the man Julia locked eyes with at the diner.

It's love at second sight, but before Julia can get Grant to the altar, they both have to meet the parents and his best friend, Andy (Sophie Monk), who's also his former fiancée.

The gross-out-heavy film wastes the proven comic talents of Hannigan, Griffin, Fred Willard and Jennifer Coolidge. Campbell and Monk add little but vapid prettiness.

"Date Movie" resembles "Saturday Night Live" more than "Scary Movie." Most of its sketches aren't funny, and even the ones that are last far too long.

The movie is blessedly short, only about 80 minutes for those who exit before the end credits, which are oddly extensive considering the film feels as though it were put together by monkeys using a dartboard covered with movie titles.

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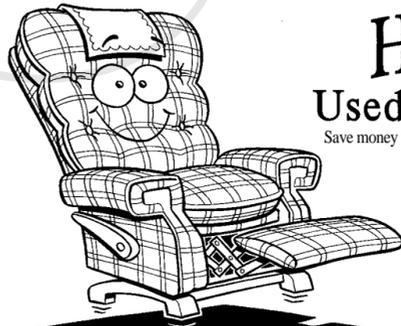
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